



Superior Court of California County of Riverside

4050 Main Street, Riverside, CA 92501

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Contact: Sherrill A. Ellsworth, Presiding Judge (951) 777-3163

Barrie J. Roberts, Director of Alternative Dispute Resolution programs (951) 777-3157

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<http://riverside.courts.ca.gov/media/media.shtml>)

PRESIDING JUDGE SHERRILL ELLSWORTH INSTITUTES “PJ SETTLEMENT DAYS” TO RESOLVE CIVIL CASES ON THE DAY OF TRIAL

RIVERSIDE COUNTY: The Riverside County Superior Court is pleased to announce a new monthly “PJ Settlement Day” program in which Presiding Judge Sherrill Ellsworth will help settle civil cases at the Historic Courthouse immediately before trial. The program begins on January 27, 2012, and is expected to help reduce the court’s civil case backlog and increase access to justice for civil litigants countywide.

During a typical Friday morning trial calendar, litigants in over 20 civil cases tell Supervising Civil Judge Mac Fisher that they are ready to start trial. However, there is rarely an open courtroom for each case due to the continuing shortage of judicial officers in Riverside County: The court needs 150 judges but only has 76 judicial officers, leaving a deficit of 74 judges, according to the Judicial Council. Adding to this ongoing strain, the court is preparing for a \$10.6 million decrease in state funding for fiscal year 2011-2012.

Therefore, during every Friday morning trial calendar, Judge Fisher encourages each civil litigant to find “a glimmer of hope” for settlement with the help of a mediator in the court’s “last chance” day-of-trial mediation program. This highly successful program was started by Judge Gloria Trask with the assistance of local attorney- mediators, Judge Woody Rich (ret) and Justice Barton Gaut (ret) in June 2008, and is now managed by the Riverside County Bar Association’s Dispute Resolution Service (DRS), directed by Chris Jensen, and supplemented by the Chapman University School of Law Mediation Clinic, directed by David Dowling.

But some complex civil cases need the special attention that only a presiding judge can provide, so Presiding Judge Sherrill Ellsworth has decided to carve out time to help settle complicated civil cases that would otherwise require many days in a courtroom before a judge or jury.

Judge Ellsworth's "PJ Settlement Days" will help litigants in these cases avoid the time, expense and stress of lengthy trials while achieving more satisfying resolutions to their disputes, saving Riverside County courtrooms for cases that truly need a judge or jury to determine the outcome.

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